

Sport

Rain returns at Trent Bridge

NOTTINGHAM, England, June 2: Rain continued to prevent the start of play on the second day of the second and final Test here at Trent Bridge on Friday, reports AFP.

The umpires had hoped to get the game underway at 1.40pm local time (1240 GMT) but a fresh burst of rain ensured no play was possible.

England, who lead the series 1-0, are 203 for three with two former captains at the crease, Michael Atherton on 96 and Alec Stewart on eight.

Brian brings 'greatness'

WORCESTER, England, June 2 (Reuters): West Indies captain Jimmy Adams is backing Brian Lara to rediscover his best form in the forthcoming five-match Test series against England.

Lara has been out of international cricket since February when he informed the West Indies Cricket Board that he needed a break from the game.

He missed the two-Test series against Zimbabwe and the just finished three-match series against Pakistan. But shortly before the selectors convened to pick their 16-man squad to tour England Lara informed them he was available again if required.

His subsequent selection has not met with widespread approval in the Caribbean.

But new captain Adams insisted on the team's arrival in Worcester, where they start a three-day fixture on Friday, that he and his players are "very happy and delighted" to have Lara back on board.

Asked what Lara's return would bring to the squad, Adams said without hesitation: "Greatness."

"His ability is beyond question. He obviously hasn't been playing any cricket for a few months so there might be a mental hurdle for him to get over."

"But if someone has asked for a rest and then comes back saying he's rested I would appreciate the rest has done him good."

"So I would like to think that with Brian's ability and keenness he will be close enough to 100 per cent by the start of the first Test to make a big contribution to our cause."

It was against England six years ago that Lara scored his world record Test score of 375. A few months later he made 501 not out, the highest score in first-class cricket, for Warwickshire.

Adams insists there is no reason why Lara cannot "do better" in future.

"As his captain and friend I am certainly hoping for even more than he has done in the past," he said. "I would like to believe he hasn't yet reached the peak of his career and will use this tour to prove the point."

"Many of the world's greatest batsmen like Viv Richards, Gordon Greenidge, Desmond Haynes and Graham Gooch all became even better players in their '30s."

"Knowing Brian's drive and ambition there's no reason why he won't do the same."

Adams admitted he had had so much "on his plate" in the Caribbean over the past three months he would have to "plead ignorance" on the current strengths and weaknesses of the England team.

"But we arrive with tremendous respect for England, though we are here to win the series."

In the wake of the match-fixing allegations that have rocked the game around the world, Adams said he had no fears that team members would be caught up in any illegal practices.

"We have done all we can to inform our players of what can happen," he said. "I have total confidence in my players that if any of them were approached they would make the right decision."

"No West Indies player has ever been implicated and we hope to keep it that way."

Ratul's claim

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is a match at the Eden Gardens, we write thousands of such stories in Bengali dailies in Calcutta everyday. But I have never had such experience in the past," he said.

Ratul said that he was called in by the BCB general secretary Syed Ashraful Huq and member Ahmed Sajjadul Alam Bobby at the media office room. When he reached there, Sajjadul handed him a rejoinder to his news and asked him to get it published immediately.

As soon as he had received the rejoinder Ashraful left the room and Sajjadul started abusing him with filthy languages, said Ratul, adding that the person who took him from press box later tried to snatch his wig while others were calling his names at the time.

Mustafizur Rahman Bobul, a member of the CCDM (Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan) and the media sub-committee, admitted he took Ratul from press box to media committee office after being instructed by Syed Ashraful Huq. But he knew nothing about what happened after he left the room.

When contacted, Sajjadul denied the allegation of Ratul.

"No one verbally abused him. He is making the story out of nothing. We just called him and handed over the rejoinder. We also asked him if he had any proof to back up his report. I think he (Ratul) was trying to taint our reputation," he said.



IF ONLY THE ON-FIELD EFFORT WAS THIS BIG: Fans came in numbers to the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday in expectation of a bold show from the home side. What they got a real shocker. —Star photo

Day 1 ends well for hosts



NOTTINGHAM, England, June 2:

Michael Atherton was in sight of his 14th Test century as England finished the first day of the second and final Test here on Thursday at Trent Bridge on 203 for three, reports AFP.

The former England captain was 96 not out off 231 balls with 13 fours and one six, Alec Stewart eight not out.

But a couple of loose strokes prevented England from enjoying an even stronger position as they lost two late wickets for six runs inside the final 30 minutes.

Captain Nasser Hussain took the shine off his day when after making 21 including five fours, he spooned a simple catch to Heath Streak at wide mid-off to give debutant medium-pacer Mluleki Nkala his first Test wicket.

Then the innocuous Nkala struck again, Graeme Hick brilliantly caught at point by Brian Murphy for five off an uncontrolled drive.

Nkala had taken two for four in six balls and might have had a third wicket when Atherton, on 89, gave a sharp chance to Stuart Carlisle who failed to hold on at short forward square leg.

But a cover-driven four off leg-spinner Murphy took Atherton to 94 and past England's great Denis Compton's ground record aggregate of 955 runs.

England, one-nil up in the series, were given an ideal start by Atherton and fellow opener Mark Ramprakash as the pair shared a stand of 121 after rain had delayed the start until 1.40pm local time (12.40 GMT).

But just when it seemed England would get through the day without losing a wicket, Ramprakash received a lifting delivery from Neil Johnson which caught the shoulder of his bat to give Grant Flower an easy catch in the gully.

The Middlesex captain was out for 56 made off 142 balls including nine fours.

Against a Zimbabwe attack, that with the exception of Heath Streak posed no physical threat to batsmen, Ramprakash was just moving into top-gear, cover-driving Johnson for a textbook four.

Hussain, hit on the hand first ball by Johnson, spent 22 balls on nought as Zimbabwe stumped the flow of runs.

But he broke free with a four off Nkala before clipping Guy Whittall off his legs for another boundary.

Atherton meanwhile was clearly seeing the ball extremely well and pulled Streak over square-leg for the day's only six.

But his off-side driving was the main feature of his innings. Atherton passed 50 for the 54th time in Tests with a superb cover-drive off Johnson that also raised the England hundred off 228 balls.

Hussain too was getting settled in nicely, his extra-cover drive for four off Nkala bringing up his 3,000th run in Test cricket.

Andy Flower rang the changes but to no initial effect. The only genuine variation came from Murphy.

Any joy Flower felt in winning the toss must have been disappearing fast at that stage.

Not that there was much joy evident in a team wearing black armbands.

The 19-year-old aborted his first delivery as he reached the crease. He followed that up with a no-ball.

Ramprakash too began nervously. But by the time Streak came back for a second spell at the Pavilion End, he played off his legs for four.

Atherton brought up England's 50 off 133 balls with a forceful cut four against Neil Johnson, going to 25.

Next ball the Zimbabweans appealed for lbw. But TV replays showed umpire Dave Orchard was right to turn it down as the ball had deflected off Atherton's inside edge.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at close on the opening day of the second and



Former England captain Mike Atherton (L), who was not out on 96 on the first day of the second Test against Zimbabwe on June 1, and Alec Stewart leaving the field at the end of the day's play. — AFP photo

final Test between Zimbabwe and England at Trent Bridge on Thursday:

ENGLAND: First innings

Atherton not out 96
Ramprakash c G Flower b Johnson 21
Hussain c Streak b Nkala 21
Hick c Murphy b Nkala 5
Stewart not out 8
Extras: (b-2, lb-8, w-1, nb-6) 17
Total: (For 3 wkt in 75 overs) 203

To bat: N Knight, A Flintoff, C Schofield, A Caddick, D Gough, E Giddins.
Fall of wickets: 1-121, 2-182, 3-188

Bowler O M R W
Streak 15 3 42 0
Nkala 18 3 51 2
Johnson 14 5 32 1
Mbangwa 11 3 27 0
Murphy 8 1 21 0
Whittall 8 5 18 0
G Flower 1 0 2 0

ZIMBABWE: G Flower, S Carlisle, M Goodwin, A Campbell, A Flower, N Johnson, G Whittall, H Streak, M Nkala, B Murphy, M Mbangwa.

Umpires: M Kitchen (England), D Orchard (South Africa)

Then when he drove loosely outside off stump the ball flew past second slip.

Streak's figures from his first spell were 6-1-12-0 and he was unlucky not to have at least one wicket.

Taking the new ball alongside Streak was Nkala, who had an unfortunate start.

A moment's stupidity'

JOHANNESBURG, June 2: Former South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje, who was fired in April for taking money from an Indian bookmaker, has blamed his behaviour on the devil, according to a newspaper report on Friday, says AFP.

The Mail and Guardian said the devoutly religious 30-year-old resorted to biblical terms to explain his extraordinary behaviour in a confession that has been handed to the South African commission of inquiry into the match-fixing scandal.

"In a moment of stupidity and weakness I allowed Satan and the world to dictate terms to me. The moment I took my eyes off Jesus my whole world turned dark," the confession reads.

Cronje, who was international cricket's longest-serving skipper when he was sacked, wrote the confession to the Rev. Ray McCauley, the leader of South Africa's Rhema Church, after allegations surfaced that he had been involved in match-fixing.

Cronje initially denied any wrongdoing, but days later rocked the foundations of international cricket by admitting that he had accepted 10,000 to 15,000 dollars for providing information and forecasts on matches during a triangular series with England and Zimbabwe.

A commission of enquiry was appointed in May to probe the Cronje scandal and is expected to hand a preliminary report to the government by June 30.

The commission, which will start hearing public submissions next week, has confirmed that it is in possession of the confession.

Cronje led South Africa to 99 wins against only 35 defeats in 138 matches, with one match tied and three others abandoned without a result, had been South Africa's most successful Test captain, with 27 wins and only 11 defeats from 53 matches.

ACB won't allow 'em to play in Asian game

SYDNEY, June 2 (Internet report): The Australian Cricket Board (ACB) has banned two of its players from taking part in a privately organised exhibition match in Asia later this year.

The ban comes amid speculation that Zee TV, India's largest network, may be considering forming a rival international circuit, outside the jurisdiction of the International Cricket Council (ICC).

Friday's Sydney Morning Herald reported an ACB spokesman as saying that the players, who were not named, and Tim May, head of the Australian Cricketers' Association (ACA), understood the reasons for the board's refusal.

The newspaper said the exhibition match was planned for Kathmandu in Nepal, an associate member of the ICC.

The issue of a possible rival Asian competition is likely to be a hot topic for discussion at the ICC meeting on June 26 in London.

A report from Dhaka published on Indian indya.com website quotes an unnamed senior Indian batsman as saying that most of the Indian team feel they are underpaid by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

The player adds that his teammates are keen to share more of the wealth which the game generates, particularly on the sub-continent where a massive television audience is fueling a bidding war for broadcast rights to the ICC's next two World Cups and other major events.

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